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Reviews

Main Currents of Spanish Literature. By J. D. M. FORD, Smith Professor of the French and Spanish Languages in Harvard University, etc. New York, Henry Holt and Company, 1919. 284 pp.

The publication of a book in English devoted to the history of Spanish literature in general is distinctly an event. In twenty years there has been but one, Fitzmaurice-Kelly's *Chapters on Spanish Literature*, a series of lectures delivered in this country and in England in 1907 and 1908. While the fact that the same author's *History of Spanish Literature* (1898) has not appeared in a revised edition indicates that the interest in this subject does not keep pace with the increasing study of the Spanish language, there is some evidence that this interest is growing, and the present book is therefore very timely.

Main Currents of Spanish Literature is a series of eight lectures delivered at the Lowell Institute in 1918, of which all but two are devoted to the great literary types, the epic (I), the ballad (II), the drama (IV, V), the lyric (VI) and the novel (VII). The others deal with Cervantes (III) and Spanish-American literature (VIII). The plan does not call for criticism in itself, but when coupled with the avowed method of treatment, which is "to be informative as to a large body of fact," it means that Professor Ford has attempted the almost impossible task of giving a general audience in a few short lectures, a notion of the breadth and depth of so special a subject as Spanish literature. That he has been tolerably successful is a credit to his perfect familiarity with his subject and to his sense of proportion. One is inclined to think that he would have done even better had he employed more the method of the critic and interpreter, and less that of the mere historian. It is certain that the most successful of the chapters are those which are centralized about a single figure (I, the Cid; III, Cervantes; IV, Lope de Vega; V, Calderon). Fitzmaurice-Kelly tried to do much less in ten lectures, nine of which were devoted to the medieval and classical periods, and still his treatment was broader.

The comparison of Ford's book with Fitzmaurice-Kelly's *Chapters* is inevitable, and while such comparison does not detract from the solid value of *Main Currents*, it does make evident its relative lack of amenity. Learning it has, as was to be expected from the distinguished position which its author occupies, but

one misses the lightness of touch, the allusiveness, the suggestiveness and the charm of style of the earlier work. However, the scope of the book, its unity of plan, its quite general accuracy and soundness of view, make it the best introduction to Spanish literature now available in our language, and augur well for the author's promised *Short History of Spanish Literature*. Its value is enhanced by numerous translations from the Spanish and an excellent index.

The following remarks on matters of detail have suggested themselves.

About half of the second lecture is taken up with the moot question of ballad origins and the opposed theories of Lang and Menéndez Pidal. Professor Ford takes an eclectic position, and thinks that some ballads come from the chronicles, some from epics, and some from ballads of the heroic age. This is a reasonable position in the present stage of our knowledge, but it is not at all clear why the last mentioned class should include only such ballads "as stand independent of any developed epopee." It may be added that the attempt to bolster up Menéndez Pidal's theory by reference to our habit of remembering or quoting only the more striking passages of English poems, is far from convincing.

The third lecture, like all the others, represents the condensation of a large body of fact. This may account for such slight inaccuracies as the mention of a noble rake "who was found dying in the apartment house" in which Cervantes was living. It is harder to explain how Ford can say that Cervantes "failed to secure a place on the boards for any of his pieces" (page 119, also pp. 75 and 83), when Cervantes states explicitly in the famous *Prologue to the Ocho Comedias*, that some of his plays were produced *con general y gustoso aplauso de los oyentes*, and adds that of the twenty or thirty early plays, *todas ellas se recitaron sin que se les ofreciese ofrenda de pepinos ni de otra cosa arrojadiza: corrieron su carrera sin siluos, gritas ni baraundas*. The curious thing is that Ford quotes from this prologue in another connection.—On p. 92 we read that the stories of Juan Manuel "were unknown to men of the age of Cervantes" and the same idea is again expressed on p. 212. As a matter of fact Argote de Molina edited the *Conde Lucanor* in 1575. To support his notion that Cervantes felt himself not to be a true poet, Ford says: "and in the *First Part* of the *Don Quixote* he admitted candidly that he had more experience in reverses than in verses." This was said not by Cervantes but by the same *Don Quixote* who elsewhere stated with false modesty that he knew *algo de achaque de glosas*. I doubt whether any evidence can be adduced to prove that Cervantes did not consider himself a good poet and dramatist.—One is sorry to come once more (p. 126) upon the oft-repeated statement that Lope de Vega "wrote more than 100 of his *Comedias*

within the space of twenty-four hours each." The passage of the *Ecloga á Claudio* which has given rise to this legend probably meant no such thing.—The "theatres established at Valencia and Seville, in the first half of the 16th century" I do not find mentioned in the standard authorities, which give 1582, possibly 1566 for Seville, and 1575 for Valencia.—It is strange that no attempt is made to give an idea of one of Lope's plays, and that not one of them is mentioned by name—p. 167. It is surely pertinent to the plot of the *Alcalde de Zalamea* that the wronged girl is daughter of the Alcalde—p. 202. It is not correct to say that Becquer "discards consonantal rhyme entirely." Rhyme is frequently used in the *Rimas*.

The chapter on the novel suffers from certain omissions, and errors of proportion, probably from errors of judgment also. There is no mention of *Cifar*, whose importance is generally recognized, and no adequate treatment of *Lazarillo de Tormes* and the rogue novel. The remarkable "generation of 1898" and the renascence of Spanish literature, are entirely ignored, as they are also in the chapter on the lyric. Fernan Caballero is given five pages as against two devoted to Palacio Valdés. One might easily differ with the judgments that "none of Valera's geniality is found in Pereda" and that Pereda is "the strongest of modern Spanish novelists." Professor Ford is very severe on those books which treat any phase of the religious question. How can one read calmly *Pépita Jiménez* and *Marta y Marta*, and not realize that these books, far from being unsuccessful attempts to portray true mysticism, are deliberate studies of a false mysticism or a mistaken religious vocation? As to Galdós, unquestionably he has heightened his colors in *Doña Perfecta*, *Gloria*, and *Roch*, for artistic effect, but this is also his method in works which do not touch the religious question, for instance in the *Marianela* which Ford praises so highly. Before accusing Galdós of bad faith one should demonstrate that he intended these cases to be taken as typical rather than as exceptional. Of course, if Professor Ford is right in his estimate of these works, they should not be used in our classes.

In the chapter on Spanish-American literature nothing is said about the modern novel and drama. If this chapter is the least interesting in the book, this is probably not the fault of the author. The negative impression one gets from reading it, is the same one gets from Coester's book, and is probably due to the fact that in the field of pure literature Spanish-America has produced relatively little work of a really high order.

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